

## **ALTO AL SIMCE: THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST STANDARDIZED TESTING IN CHILE<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article describes the Alto al SIMCE (Stop SIMCE) campaign which aims to end the national standardized tests in Chile. In the context of the mobilizations for education in Chile, this campaign was successful in publicly and massively questioning the most used evaluative instrument in one of the most neoliberal educational systems in the world. The strategy of this action group was characterized by a strong criticism of the negative consequences of the test. It also intensively used digital social networks to break the information siege in the country. Our analysis states that Alto al SIMCE took advantage of contingency and generated alliances with the student movement in order to achieve government and media recognition. In this sense, the campaign made visible the strength of the resistance against the current educational system in the country, where new social media played a fundamental role, re-framing the discussion about the quality of education. However, the lack of human and economic resources prevented the development of Alto al SIMCE into a more active media campaign, capable of ending the SIMCE test.

**RESUMEN** Este artículo describe la campaña Alto al SIMCE, una iniciativa para poner fin en Chile a las pruebas nacionales estandarizadas que afectan a maestros, estudiantes y a la educación pública. En el contexto de las movilizaciones para la educación en Chile, esta campaña fue exitosa en cuestionar públicamente y masivamente el instrumento de evaluación más utilizado en uno de los sistemas educativos más neoliberales del mundo. La estrategia de este grupo de acción se caracterizó por una fuerte crítica de las consecuencias negativas de la prueba, pero también por el uso intensivo de las redes sociales digitales

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para romper el cerco de información en el país. Este movimiento hizo visible la fuerza de la resistencia contra el actual sistema educativo en el país, donde las nuevas redes sociales jugaron un papel fundamental, re-enmarcando la discusión sobre la calidad de la educación. Nuestro análisis afirma que a pesar de que la falta de recursos humanos y económicos impide que se convierta en una campaña mediática más activa, Alto Al SIMCE es capaz de aprovechar la contingencia, generar alianzas con el movimiento estudiantil, y lograr el reconocimiento del gobierno y de los medios de comunicación. En este sentido, la campaña hizo visible la fuerza de la resistencia en contra del actual sistema educacional del país, en donde las nuevas redes sociales jugaron un rol fundamental re-enmarcando la discusión sobre la calidad de la educación.

**KEYWORDS** Measurement, Action, Resistance, Mediatisation, Mobilisation

## Introduction

For more than a decade, Chile has been experiencing a series of social mobilizations to address a widespread discontent with the country's educational system and the negative consequences of the neoliberal reforms implemented in the nineteen eighties by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In 2006, secondary students led the well-known Penguin Revolution named after the dark blue and white color of their school uniforms. Five years later, the student movement of 2011 drew millions of people to the streets during seven months of intense popular mobilizations. This movement has influenced the policy agenda for public education and sparked new debates about proposed reforms for teacher training, school and higher education.

The *Alto al SIMCE* (Stop the SIMCE) campaign emerged in this context of increased social concern for public education. The campaign demanded the elimination of the *Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación* [Education Quality Measurement System], that consists of a battery of standardized tests that measure student learning. This test is taken every year by students in grades 4, 8 and 10, and encompasses subjects like mathematics, language and communication, English, social and natural sciences, and history.

SIMCE was created in the late eighties by the Education Minister of Augusto Pinochet, Juan Antonio Guzmán. Standardized testing was introduced to Chile with the neoliberal

rationale that competition promotes education quality for all students. SIMCE was presented as an evaluation tool which would provide information to help parents compare schools – public and private - and choose the best institutions for their children. Thus, it was intended to promote the neoliberal principle of choice or the “freedom to choose” and further undermine a neglected public education system.

In 2013, the government incorporated test results into the existing system to rank and classify schools. In this new system, the results of the SIMCE represented seventy three percent of the total classification score. High-performing schools received recognition and financial rewards. The schools with the lowest rankings, usually public schools, faced the risk of losing the government recognition usually resulting in school closure. However, test results did not take into account one of the biggest differences between public and private schools in Chile. Namely the fact that private schools were highly selective in their admissions procedures while public schools served all students, particularly those from backgrounds of poverty. Pino et al. (2016) highlight the correlation between SIMCE score and family income and the disproportionately adverse effects of closing low performing schools on the poorest students. Instead, consistent with market ideology, consistently poorer results from public schools were attributed to poor administration and decision-making by school staff (Campos-Martínez y Guerrero, 2016).

In 2013, a group of public education activists launched the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign with the argument that this test was pressuring students and educational communities to compete, harming public education. Thus, the campaign became the first attempt to publicly and systematically question this mechanism of pressure on schools (Flórez, 2013). This article focuses on the role of media in campaign initiatives to reframe discussion about public issues in education. The central objective of this article is to document this particular struggle for public education and learn from its strategies of mobilization using new and traditional media. In order to develop this objective, we firstly emphasize the importance of the media in the study of educational policies and the relationship between cyberactivism and social movement. Secondly, we describe in detail the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign as an example of media activism for public

education. Finally, we conclude with several reflections about this experience of struggle for public education.

### **Mediatization of public education**

Scholarship on the power and influence of media in society is concerned with the ability of news media to set the agenda and frame the themes in the public discussion. These agenda setting and framing operations have been extensively studied in political communication (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014), but they have only recently become a subject of analysis in the educational field (Rawolle, 2010).

Media, especially print media, play a fundamental role in the debate, evaluation, and implementation of educational policies. Educational governance is decentralized and various actors, including media, work to promote changes or to keep the status quo (Ball and Exley, 2010). This process is known as the mediatization of education (Couldry, 2012; Lingard and Rawolle, 2004) and is an emerging area of study in Latin America (Robert, 2012; Santa Cruz Grau and Olmedo, 2012). In this discussion, media are a forum that allows the participation of multiple actors, and at the same time, they are involved in the debate as political actors and social institutions.

The 2011 student movement in Chile understood that without media it was very difficult to achieve social adhesion and to push the boundaries of the political discussion about education (Cabalin, 2014). In a country where the neoliberal consensus has become common sense, the success of student mobilizations can be explained in part by re-framing the public debate about education (Santa Cruz G. and Olmedo, 2012). This article approaches social problems as social construction where the dominant framing of a social problem can be attributed to three general causes: claims-maker activities, media practices, and cultural themes or resonances” (Benson and Saguy, 2005, p.235). In the case of *Alto al SIMCE*, we can observe that these three processes occur. The activists used a powerful media strategy with intensive use of information and communication technologies. Traditional media could not ignore this tactic in the context of a political opportunity created by the 2011 movement which had ensured unprecedented attention and support for public education in the country.

In their study of the mediatisation of educational policies, Bob Lingard and Shaun Rawolle used Bourdieu's field theory to explain the interactions between the fields of education and the media. Rawolle and Lingard (2010) explain that the study of mediatisation focuses on "how individuals or groups within specific fields produce practices involving the media as a strategic way of shaping or changing practices in fields beyond the media, such as politics and education policy" (p. 271). In the case of education, these practices involve the development of new strategies, positions, discourses, and concepts in the policy process on local or global scales.

From this perspective, "media reports about these [test] evaluations have encouraged systems to become more cynical and focus on comparative performance rather than substantive improvement" (Lingard and Sellar, 2013, p. 645). Thus, information about the performance of students on standardized tests acts as a catalyst for both mediatic and systemic reactions, conditioning the discourses and practices of the political and educational world (Lingard and Sellar, 2013). In this sense, mediatisation, as a theoretical construction, "can be used in studies in which the practices of different agents in the media are intricately linked in struggles for social power in other social fields, such as politics and in our case, educational policy production" (Rawolle and Lingard, 2010, p. 273).

The study of mediatisation encompasses the appropriation of digital resources in contexts of social mobilization (Peña et al., 2016). Our conceptual approach to the forms of online activism employed by the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign is informed by the scholarship on cyberactivism. Online activist communities defy the imbalance of power and/or may criticize certain ideologies or situations that generate inequities (Castells, 2012). In this sense, any site of collective struggle or social movement are sites for the production of meaning and knowledge as explored in the Introduction to this Special Issue and previous issues of this journal (Thapliyal, 2014).

We also view digital media not only as tools of political tools but also as sites that constitute particular kinds of participation and formation of collective struggle:

Social media [] has not only provided an unlimited global means of communication and debate for burgeoning social movements, but has also shaped the manner in which one participates in activism. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are not outlets for social movements, but have determined the way in which social movements are constructed and disseminated (Chapman, 2016, p. 26).

Thus, participation, behind the screens or on the streets, becomes a key aspect when speaking about cyberactivism, because it implies a certain degree of affiliation, collective identity, and sense of membership (Jenkins, Ito and Boyd, 2016). For a social movement to take place, there has to be at least a sense of community from its participants. Jankowski (2006) approaches this notion of community and its regeneration through mediated<sup>2</sup> forms of communication. Henry Jenkins (2006) uses the term “participatory politics”, defined as the “point where participatory culture meets political and civic participation, where political change is promoted through social and cultural mechanisms rather than through established political institutions”. The power of networked culture is such that “even forms of expression that might had a very limited audience in the past now travel through networks and thus have bigger social consequences” (Jenkins et al 2016:10).

Our analysis will show that the use of media by the campaign played a key role in generating a sense of community and belonging in multiple ways across a diverse community including academics, secondary school students and teachers, university students, prominent public individuals, and others. In addition, we identify and discuss particular forms of digital media-based participatory cultures such as those produced by activist youth (Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> It refers to the role that media plays in the contemporary world, where most of the people have to resort to media to inform themselves and communicate with other people. This non-direct type of communication implies that we have access to an important portion of reality only through media representations.



## **Methodology**

This article draws on interviews with key informants who participated in the campaign, documents shared by the campaign through its online social networks, and on a previous study about representations of the SIMCE in Chilean news media (insert citation here). The researchers were not members of the campaign. We interviewed current spokespersons of the campaign: two education professors and one primary school teacher referred to as Spokesperson 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The interviews were aimed at understanding the Alto al SIMCE campaign's experience with the media and social networks. The three interviews were semi-structured and each lasted for about an hour.

We also studied the contents of all virtual platforms through which the campaign communicates with its audiences, that is, its web page and social networks accounts. Media articles in which the campaign had been mentioned, the informative contents that had been produced by the campaign, and the messages produced by their followers were all analyzed<sup>3</sup>.

Given the diversity of the news media landscape in Chile, we also found it useful to incorporate findings from a previous quantitative study about media representations of the SIMCE in two influential national print newsmedia – *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* (Florez et al. 2015).

## **The news media landscape in Chile**

The Alto al SIMCE campaign recognized and engaged with the power of both print news media as well as relatively newer digital news media outlets. *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* were referred to as “traditional” news media by campaign spokespersons. These two newspapers have the largest circulation and the largest advertising revenue of all the print news media in Chile (Chilean Association of Media Agencies, 2015). They are owned by two politically conservative families which operate the two largest media conglomerates in the country - El Mercurio S.A. and Copesa Group. In Latin America, Chile stands out for the degree of concentration of ownership of media media (Observacom, 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> This qualitative and quantitative content was recovered from the open and accessible twitter feed with the help of NVivo 11 software.

Digital news media such as *El Mostrador.cl*, *El Desconcierto.cl*, *El Ciudadano.cl* and *El Quinto Poder.cl*, are considered as “non-traditional” due to the novelty of their format. They are also viewed differently because they are not owned by large business corporations. For instance, *El Mostrador* was the first Chilean digital newspaper. It belongs to Plaza S.A. a business group with a majority of shares in the real estate industry, including the chain of shopping centers known in Chile as “Mall Plaza”.

The other three digital news outlets mentioned above have diverse group of owners. *El Desconcierto* was created in 2011 by a group of professionals from the social sciences. It belongs to the independent editorial group called *Ediciones y Publicaciones El Buen Aire S.A.* *El Ciudadano* is a biweekly national circulation newspaper and a digital website created in 2005 by the journalist Bruno Sommer and the Journalistic Society called *El Ciudadano*. *El Quinto Poder* is a news website where users provide the news which means that everyone can register on the system and send opinion columns, photographs or videos. This news website was created by *Democracia y Desarrollo*, a foundation presided by the ex-Chilean president Ricardo Lagos Escobar.

### **Alto al SIMCE: Origins and alliances**

In 2012, various academics and graduate students inside and outside Chile created a virtual network to discuss the restrictions on the right to education. Some of them exchanged emails and messages on virtual social networks for years before meeting in person. In October 2012, a collaborative working group of ten people was formed under the name “Collective for a New Education”. The Collective was established partially in response to the establishment of the Education Quality Agency (ACE, *Agencia de Calidad de la Educación*) to improve educational equity and quality through the use of standardized testing.

The members of the collective were convinced that an informed discussion about educational equity and quality could contribute to the end of high-stakes testing. Thus, they decided to start the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign as a way to demonstrate the negative consequences of testing to students, teachers, and parents. The long-term purpose was to destabilize the common sense that maintains the market-oriented educational system in Chile.



The core team of AS grew to include twenty four education academics located in fields like anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and economy. Since 2012, the group meets once a week. Every January, they have a planning day to define campaign objectives and strategy. All the tasks of the campaign are distributed in an equitable way and according to the needs of the moment. The only formal role is the one of the spokesperson. This role has been filled by four people over the last four years, three of whom remain active in the campaign.

The Collective observed that teachers and students were unhappy about SIMCE but that their discourse was relatively less articulate than discussions taking place in academic and political spheres. They came up with the term “The Bothered” (*Los Molestos*) to describe the unarticulated dissatisfaction that characterized this section of the public. According to Spokesperson 1, “something about the educational system bothered them, although not all of them had a clear discourse to express themselves”. Therefore, the campaign made the strategic decision to first build a relationship with other progressive education activists in order to establish a presence to the mass media.

The first official activity of the campaign took place in August 2013. It brought together a diverse group of educational organizations to talk about the implications of the test for the Chilean educational system. Participants included representatives from student and teacher unions such as *Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile*, CONFECH, [Students Confederation of Chile], the *Coordinadora Nacional de Estudiantes Secundarios*, CONES, [National Coordinator of Secondary Students], the *Asamblea Coordinadora de Estudiantes Secundarios*, ACES, [Coordinator Assembly of Secondary Students<sup>4</sup>], and members of the Teacher Union.

The objective for this meeting was to begin to build a common discourse about the problems associated with the test across

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4 The ACES emerged in 2000 as a dissident group of the Federation of Secondary Students of Santiago de Chile, FESES, which they criticized for their closeness to political parties. CONES emerged in 2011 with the intention to reestablish the connection between Chile’s high school students and political parties. ACES is open to all secondary students but CONES only works with leaders of organized groups of students.

disconnected political spheres. This common discourse focused on the disadvantages of the test for teachers community and students, specifically in the stress produced by competitiveness among schools. (Pino et al. 2016:343).

The Collective also began to build alliances with key groups and organizations involved in the 2010-2014 student movement to defend public higher education against the neoliberal reforms of the Sebastián Piñera government. Press conferences were organized along with these student organizations, and articles and opinion columns were written by Alto al SIMCE members to increase media impact.

### **Reaching traditional and digital media**

The campaign developed its communication strategies based on the recognition that mainstream news media was largely in favor of SIMCE and relatedly the ideology of competition and school choice. According to Spokesperson 2, news media also encouraged the idea that private schools were better than public schools. Thus, the goal of Alto al SIMCE was to position the test as a topic of debate in the public sphere.

Table 1 provides a quantitative summary of all communication and mobilization actions undertaken by the campaign between 2013 and April 2017. This data was compiled using information provided on the campaign webpage as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts

<b>Communication Actions</b>	<b>N°</b>
Press conferences	6
Forums and open meetings at educational institutions	36
Press Publications about Alto al SIMCE	170
Expert opinion articles by Collective members	37
Declarations, videos, and documents produced by the campaign	29

Campaign members considered three of these events particularly significant which are discussed in depth here.

The first milestone for the campaign was the 2013 publication of the “Manifest for overcoming educational standardization in Chile”. This Manifest analyzed the drawbacks of educational standardization associated with the SIMCE. It was signed by 6 education researchers and published online on the website of the Center for Journalistic Research (CEJR) website<sup>5</sup> on August 29, 2013.

In addition, the campaign sought public support from Chilean academics and public intellectuals in the form of a signature petition called “Open Letter for a New Educational Evaluation System”. They drafted an open letter which sought to communicate the principles that underpinned the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign discussed previously.

The letter was signed by more than 140 academics and researchers. The first signatory to the letter was the prominent educator and newly named 2013 National Education Award winner, Beatrice Avalos. This is significant because of the contributions that Avalos has made to research about pedagogy and teachers professionalization in Chile. Avalos was responsible for the creation of a highly respected Interdisciplinary Research Program on Education at the University of Chile during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The letter received coverage in mainstream news media beginning with the conservative *El Mercurio* (Muñoz, 2013).

The third significant event was the delivery of a letter titled “New School Evaluation Model” to the Ministry of Education on June 3, 2014. The letter asked the Ministry to stop SIMCE as well as the publication of the test results for two years, in order to reconsider the whole educational quality measurement system. This action was planned to draw the attention of the news media and was inspired by the book titled *The Little Prince* written and illustrated by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

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<sup>5</sup> The website called CIPER was created in 2007. It is a non-profit foundation funded by the Copesa Group, the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundation of London. It represents itself as an investigative journalism organization free of political or partisan affiliation. In Chile it is well known for its investigations of tax evasion carried out by Chilean businessmen and politicians including current President Sebastián Piñera.

The book tells the story of a boy who wonders about human nature, such as love, meaning of life, friendship and loneliness, while he travels through universe. One of the greatest conclusions that he comes to is that “what is essential is invisible to the eye”. The campaign drew on this message to communicate that the value of education could not only be found through quantification and measurement of learning. It constructed the slogan “The essential is invisible to SIMCE” to communicate that the test was ignoring important values related to education because of its stress on quantitative achievement.

The letter was delivered to the Ministry located in the governmental palace known as *La Moneda* by Chilean television actor, Alonso Quinteros who has a great resemblance to the Little Prince character. The action was also supported by prominent progressive figures including Congress members and former leaders of the 2011 Student Movement. The event received widespread coverage in the news media including left- and right-wing as well as traditional and digital media organizations.

An important feature of the relationship between Alto al SIMCE and the media is the role of experts. At the beginning of the campaign, Spokesperson 1 identified a tendency for the traditional media to undervalue the position of Alto al SIMCE and other critical voices. Spokesperson 1 described the relations as follows: “The first reaction is to infantilize you, to tell you that you are having a tantrum, that you do not want tests and you do not want to be evaluated ever. Then, when they are presented with theoretical arguments they get impressed”.

At the same time, a preference for a certain kind of expert and relatedly, a particular kind of education discourse was also noted by the campaign. Spokesperson 2 described media preferred discourse in the following terms: “The media are eager to hear more technical than political arguments. So, if one is talking about a statistical correlation and they do not understand you very much, it’s fine because ‘it sounds serious’. On the other hand, when you say that the SIMCE is a tool of the education market, they ignore you or change the subject”.

Nevertheless, the campaign used the “expert bias” with the support of both national and international scholars who were

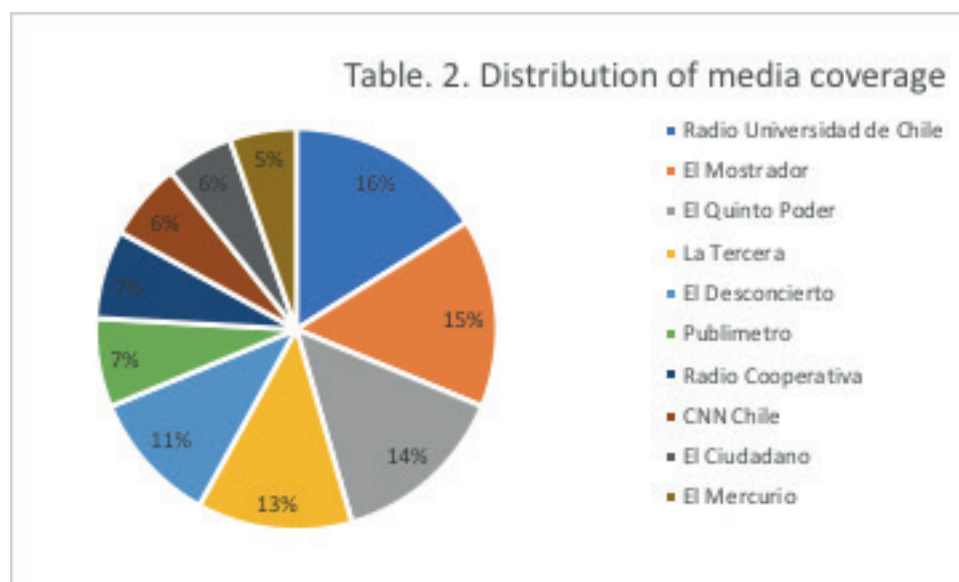
critical of high-stakes standardized testing<sup>6</sup>. National academic experts wrote opinion pieces about the negative impact of the test in education. Specifically, we found 40 opinion columns written by experts from and outside the campaign, that mentioned Alto al SIMCE, and 37 that did not mention the campaign but supported its arguments against the test.

### Cyberactivism

The internet was one of the most important media for the Alto al SIMCE campaign. It provided an opportunity to deliver messages to the public free of corporate news bias.

The campaign received more sympathetic coverage in progressive digital news outlets than in traditional news outlets. Table 2 presents the distribution of news media coverage of campaign events and publications in traditional and digital outlets. The four top media in which the campaign was published - Radio Universidad de Chile, El Mostrador, El Quinto Poder and La Tercera – together the greatest per day at a national level (Del Valle y Garín, 2015).

The campaign came to view the first three of these outlets as as important allies in their struggle.



<sup>6</sup> The campaign has received messages of support from researchers and scholars like Jennifer Greene, Stephen Ball, Michael Apple, and Pauline Lipman, who have a critical perspective about standardized tests.

The internet also allowed the campaign to reach and build networks across diverse sections of the public, particularly between students and academics. In Chile, 70 percent of the population were internet users. Within this group, people between the ages of 15 and 29, are the ones that most frequently use the internet to communicate and inform themselves (Telecommunications Subsecretariat, 2015).

The campaign used Facebook and Twitter to communicate with this population. Since it was created in August 2013, the Alto al SIMCE's Facebook page has gathered more than 17,400 "Likes" and its Twitter account, more than 3,560 followers<sup>7</sup>. Both social media platforms are used to disseminate information of interest in the form of videos, documents, and press articles accompanied by hashtags such as #SIMCE, #altoalSIMCE (Stop SIMCE) and #nodoyelSIMCE (I don't take the SIMCE).

Videos were a key component of online campaign communications and are discussed further here. In 2014, Alto al SIMCE distributed their first educational video titled "El problema del SIMCE"<sup>8</sup> [The SIMCE Problem through their social media accounts and free online videohosting site YouTube. In 2015 the campaign produced more videos with voluntary assistance from a group of young media activists called *Machete Productions*. These short videos combined the experience of researchers, teachers, and students to explain how testing negatively affected learning<sup>9</sup> and contributed to the commercialisation of public<sup>10</sup>. Other videos highlighted the negative effects of competitive testing on discrimination<sup>11</sup>,

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7 Data recovered on April 2017

8 It currently has more than 7,800 views on YouTube. Alto al Simce (2014, September 14). The SIMCE Problem [Video File]. Recovered from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6Sxp58nNe0>

9 Alto al Simce (2015, September 15). How does SIMCE affect learning? [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHyoa449tKU>

10 Alto al Simce (2015, October 1). Why is SIMCE a pillar of the education market? [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KM1w9WURMU>

11 Alto al Simce (2015, August 17). Discriminating is not educating [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVx3QOJXLnY>



bullying<sup>12</sup>, and exclusion<sup>13</sup> in schools. Currently, these videos altogether have reached more than 16,800 views on YouTube.

### **Organizing a test boycott**

By this time, the public had begun to question the relationship between the SIMCE and the quality of education. In response, shortly after starting her second term, President Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) created a Presidential Task Force to review SIMCE. The campaign was invited to make a presentation to the Task Force on August 19, 2014 where it highlighted the negative consequences of the test and advocated that it was time to “to stop, sit down and think about a new system” (Spokesperson 2).

The recommendations of the Task Force were released in January 2015 and focused exclusively on the need to provide students and teachers with more support to deal with the pressures associated with test. It is important to point out here that the test is tied to a series of federal legislations<sup>14</sup> that restrict the possibility of even small modifications. Thus, federal recognition of the campaign appeared to be limited to a willingness to dialogue rather than a willingness to consider fundamental change. Our newspaper analysis revealed that this position of minor modifications to SIMCE also characterized reporting on SIMCE in *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*.

In response, the campaign published a report called *ChangeEverything so that Nothing Changes* which was distributed through its webpage and social media networks. The report highlighted the superficial nature of the Task Force recommendations. After this experience, the group decided to adopt a new strategy and decided to make 2015 “the year of the boycott.” The online videos played a key role in campaign strategy along with more than 30 public forums and events involving AS spokespeople, teachers and students around the

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12 Alto al Simce (2015, August 9). Overwhelming is not to educate [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8Dzo8QXdn4>

13 Alto al Simce (2015, August 3). To exclude is not to educate [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UW9nyQDBgRo>

14 These include the General Education Act, the Education Quality Assurance Act, the Preferential School Grant Act, and the National Performance Assessment System Act, Sned.

country<sup>15</sup>. Two press conferences were held on October 6th and November 5th, to inform the media and public about the possibilities and consequences of the test boycott.

During this period, Twitter and Facebook platforms allowed the campaign to receive and provide timely information about the mobilizations occurring in schools. Social media facilitated the circulation of messages and images including memes and photos of students, parents and teachers holding posters with the slogan – *Alto al SIMCE* or Stop SIMCE. One of the most liked and shared images on Facebook came from a student in the north of the country in October of 2015. The student posted the following message - “Your standardized test does not reflect my abilities, my dreams, and the work of my teachers. I am not a statistic, nor a number. I am a boy who is wasting his precious childhood on your test”<sup>16</sup>. This post received more than 7,000 Likes and was shared more than 13,300 times.

### **Final remarks**

The *Alto al SIMCE* campaign raised questions about the benefits of the SIMCE test in the corporate news media, educational organizations, and among political authorities. After two years of boycotts, the Michelle Bachelet government eliminated two of the annual tests in 2015. This was achieved through a new media and online campaign in which two main elements operated. First, *Alto al SIMCE* positioned an activist discourse that drew the attention of students, teachers, and parents that were critical of the Chilean educational system. The campaign was particularly effective in articulating multimedia messages which resonated with these audiences and encouraged them to take concrete actions against the test.

Second, the group deployed the extensive knowledge and academic networks of its members (Insunza, 2015) to produce an expert discourse for the corporate news media and education

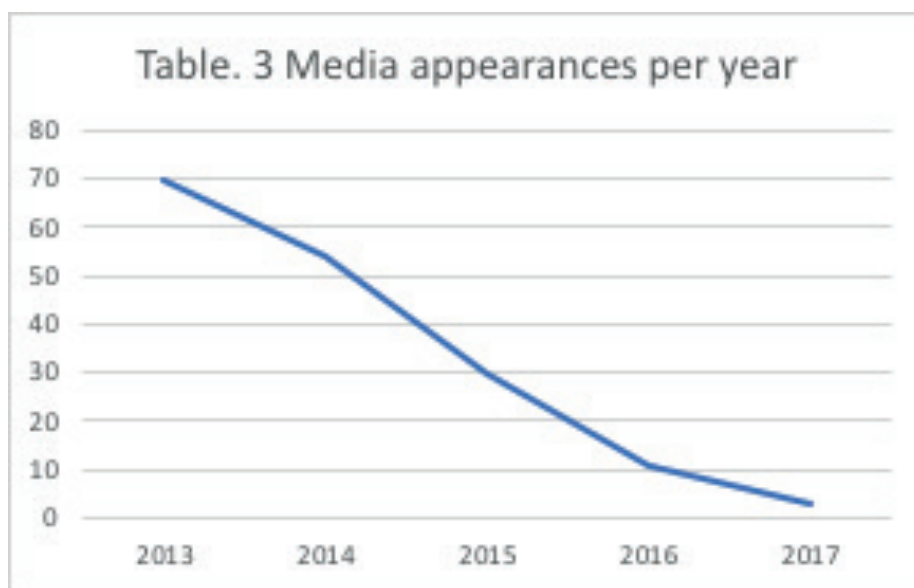
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15 These included the cities of Antofagasta, Valparaíso, Santiago, Rancagua, Concepción, Castro y Ancud, that represents the north, the center and the south of the Chilean territory.

16 Alto al Simce, (2015, October 13). Resistance: We received this photo from Diego de Almagro, in the III Region of Atacama. #AltoalSIMCE #NoDoySIMCE. Facebook status update. Recovered from: <https://www.facebook.com/altoalsimce/photos/a.619290298102539.1073741828.615175885180647/1030689950295903/?type=3&theater>

policy sector. With support from national and international scholars, the campaign produced opinion columns for online and print news media which legitimized core campaign messages.

Despite this, the campaign is far from its main goal, which is the elimination of the test. According to Spokesperson 1, the campaign's authority to critique SIMCE received greatest recognition and legitimacy from traditional news media by 2016 and has declined in 2017 (see Table 3). The shift in the relationship with traditional news media did not allow the campaign to influence how education issues were defined



by news media. The role of the campaign was limited to responding to education discourse constructed by news media. Spokesperson 3 described the relationship as follows: “We do not get to be on the media agenda when we want to, but [only] when they want us to”.

We believe that this is mainly due to two factors. From Pierre Bourdieu's (2005) perspective, the relation between *Alto al SIMCE* and the media can be understood as a tension between two fields where the media and those more powerful impose their rules on the field of media activism. The campaign has been able to adapt to traditional journalistic practices using expert discourse. However, it has also lost momentum due to ever-changing news cycles. Thus the capacity of the campaign

to influence the press and the government depends in part on the historical moment. In this case, the impact of the campaign cannot be analysed in separation from the opportunities presented by digital news media as well as the presence of other education mobilizations working to reposition the public debate around the commodification and standardization of education.

The second factor is that the campaign is strongly associated with a student movement that has declined in strength, unity and public support with the arrival of a more centrist government. According to Spokesperson 1, it was “very easy to fight” the right-wing Piñera-led government “because the message was super clear and dichotomous: them against us”. During the Michelle Bachelet government, however, campaign critiques were quickly absorbed by the official discourse.

From our perspective, therefore the main challenge of the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign, is to re-position the discourse in the current context. This is no small challenge for a campaign team made up of volunteers who must reconcile their time and energy dedicated to activism with their jobs, studies, and personal lives. The issue is quite often a lack of resources: “If I imagine successful media strategies, I think of having people who are able to publish news to position their own discourse and not respond to hegemonic discourses. At the heart, that means leading an agenda of change... And all that requires resources, people, contacts,” declared Spokesperson 2.

Nevertheless, we believe that the campaign fosters a sense of belonging that is deeply connected to a larger and longer social movement in the recent history of Chile: the mobilization for the defense of public education. Although *Alto al SIMCE* has not achieved its main goal as yet, its experience tells us that a modest activist media campaign is capable of disrupting dominant educational discourse about standardized testing.

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